Accellion

Healthcare Case Study
Henry M. Jackson Foundation

File transfer problems.
Solved.

hjf

Medical researchers use Accellion Secure File Transfer to share large volumes of medical data to help solve battlefield medical problems.

Background

The Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine, Inc. is a private, not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving military medicine and public health. Since 1983, HJF teams have helped military personnel conduct quality medical research and education programs. For example, the organization's research has transformed how the military treats wounds and pain on the battlefield, helping to create higher survival rates for injured military personnel.

The Foundation employs about 1,600 medical, scientific and other personnel, and has relationships with more than 160 military medical organizations around the globe. It takes a worldwide collaborative effort among all these organizations to carry out the extensive medical research that helps to saves lives in times of military conflict.

Researchers and government agencies routinely must exchange large electronic files such as rich media presentations and data sets. Moving this information around the world securely and expeditiously is a real challenge. Because it is sensitive medical data, this information is subject to privacy protection under laws such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) in the United States. Transferring files from one researcher to another must be done through a secure channel to ensure data integrity as well as privacy.

Challenges

Michael Wilson, Director of IT infrastructure for HJF, dismissed the idea of using FTP or even SFTP as a means to transfer files. "FTP might be the 'obvious' solution for exchanging large files, but the fact is, FTP poses too many problems," according to Wilson. "It's not very intuitive for people to use, and IT has to spend too much time fielding support calls, creating new FTP accounts, and purging old files from the server."

HJF workers gravitated toward putting the data on CDs or DVDs and sending them via a courier service as the workers understood and could control this process themselves. Unfortunately, this added time and expense to the process of exchanging files, in addition to introducing the opportunity for data integrity breaches.

"When a CD ROM is created with data, it has to be certified and transported in a sealed container via a courier service," says Wilson. "There needs to be a record of who has touched the container so that the researcher knows it hasn't been tampered with. Then when they get the data they need to verify that the data contained on the CD ROM is the same data that was written to the CD ROM. It's a process that takes a week or more for each disk."

Clearly, the "traditional" methods of file transfer would not work for HJF. The Foundation's Information Technology team began a search for a truly secure and HIPAA-compliant file transfer method that would be easy enough to use by everyone, while at the same time requiring little intervention from the IT department.

"Rather than take a strictly technical approach to finding a file transfer solution, we took our users' preferences into account as we began our search," says Wilson. "We figured we'd speed up the rate of adoption and increase our probability of success if we implemented a solution that people feel comfortable with."

Wilson's team outlined several attributes for a solution that would allow

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the Foundation to meet the "ease of use" requirements while also meeting or exceeding the mandated requirements for security and compliance:

- An email-centric user interface
- An available web interface
- Secured access for external partners
- IT administrative tools

The IT team believed most workers would be familiar with an email-centric user interface. "This would virtually guarantee easy adoption, as well as cut down on the need for training," says Wilson. But HJF also wanted a file transfer tool with a web interface so that the tool could be available to all users, regardless of their computer platforms or their access to email. "It also relieves the IT team of installing and maintaining client software," says Wilson.

The file transfer solution also has to be usable by the numerous external partners that do business with HJF. "Exchanging large files is a two-way street," says Wilson. "Furthermore, extending the capability to external users would enhance the overall organizational secure file transfer process."

Hands-off IT administration is another important criterion. "The IT team needs all the help it can get!" admits Wilson. Therefore, the team wanted features such as automated file lifecycle management and user account self-provisioning capabilities.

Solution

After an extensive search, HJF selected the Accellion Secure File Transfer system for a pilot project. The Accellion solution met or exceeded all of the Foundations' requirements for ease of use, ease of administration and security/compliance.

Wilson explains how the pilot program helped his team project the willingness of end users to permanently adopt the Accellion solution for file transfer. "As part of the pilot, instead of holding training sessions on how to use the Accellion system, we decided to test our hypothesis of selecting a solution that proactively meets user preferences by giving out access to just a few users who are regularly sending out 60MB+ files as email attachments and held our breath," admitted Wilson. "To our joy, and as validation of our hypothesis, as word of the process moved throughout the internal and external user community, we quickly began receiving access requests to the Accellion solution." HJF concluded the pilot and then rolled out access to the Accellion Secure File Transfer system to all its employees as well as a group of authorized external partners.

The Accellion secure file transfer solution has improved work processes and data security in a number of ways. Files of virtually any size can be sent to and received from internal or external colleagues in just minutes. Since the files are encrypted prior to being transported over a secure channel, there is little concern about a security breach. As for confirming that what is received is precisely what was sent, the Accellion system provides a "checksum" feature to verify the integrity of the file contents.

The Accellion system also provides a receipt to the file sender to verify exactly who has accessed the file, and when. This is an important audit feature to support HIPAA compliance.

Files are assigned a definite "expiration date" to ensure they are not available for any longer than necessary. This lifecycle management feature is automatic and requires no intervention from IT to clean up the file storage server, as is required with an FTP server.

Wilson says setup and installation of the Accellion were quite easy. "This was the best overall setup of any system I have worked on in the past five years. The installation guide is very thorough and it prepared me and my team for exactly what the Accellion system was going to do and how it would do it. When I installed the unit, it lived up to expectations and didn't interfere with any other devices or network services."

Internally, HJF integrated the Accellion solution with its Lotus Notes email system and its Novell eDirectory enterprise directory service. "The Accellion product integrated 100 percent perfectly with our Novell eDirectory," says Wilson. "This is usually a challenge as most folks use Microsoft Active Directory, which we don't. There were no problems with the Notes integration, either. This proved to us that Accellion has a broad enough development team to cover integration with a variety of products." Wilson adds, "This is perhaps the first appliance/software/hardware that we have had no problems with at all. That's very impressive from my standpoint." Michael Wilson is delighted with his team's choice for a secure file transfer system.. "The Accellion appliance is simple and elegant. I would recommend this product to other organizations without hesitation. If an organization needs to send sensitive or large files, or wants to ensure that data transfer is easy for users, then the Accellion Secure File Transfer system is the best method I've found to share files."

BENEFITS

- Easy- to-use method allows workers inside and outside the organization to exchange sensitive medical research data in a timely fashion.

- Data integrity is preserved as the secure file transfer method improves compliance with HIPAA .

- IT administrative and support time is minimal

- The solution integrates with existing IT systems to enhance productivity and security

Specifications

Henry M. Jackson Foundation	
Deployed since	January 2006
# of Appliances	1
Location of Appliances	Rockville, MD
# of Internal and External Users	500 Internal Unlimited External
LDAP/AD directory integration	Yes
Web Interface	Yes
Email plug-in	Lotus Notes

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